

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors and a Question-and-Answer Session

January 20, 2023

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You'd better sit down. You don't want this going to my head. *[Laughter]* A kid from Scranton.

Look, Mayor Suarez, thank you for your leadership at the conference.

[At this point, the President cleared his throat.]

Excuse me, I've got a little frog in my throat. But—and, Andy, thank you for that introduction.

You know, it's wonderful to finally welcome all of you to the White House after not being able to because of the pandemic for so long. We appreciate it a great deal.

And some of you know I started my career as a county councilman in the State of Delaware. And then I ran for the U.S. Senate because serving as a local official was too hard. *[Laughter]* They know where you live—*[laughter]*—and knock on your door. And I've always had enormous respect for the job you do.

And by the way, Suarez, you and I have something else in common. Do you know what it is? We both married way above our station. *[Laughter]* Way, way above our station. *[Laughter]* You all think I'm kidding. Some things are just self-evident. *[Laughter]*

Today—today—is 2 years since I was sworn in as President. *[Applause]* No—and with your help—with your help, we've gotten a lot done. I think if you look around the room, we've got a lot of Cabinet members who were mayors. A lot of mayors.

You've got old Mitch Landrieu from New Orleans down there, you know. And he—that's like being mayor of a country. *[Laughter]*

Yes, I'll tell you what. My daughter went down to Tulane University in large part because his dad—it's a long story, but—when he was mayor. And I thought she was going to come home talking with, boy, talking funny at me, you know what I mean, from—*[laughter]*—from Bayou Lafourche or something.

And I—but—and Mayor Pete is—*[applause]*—even though he's the Secretary, they still call him "Mayor Pete." And you know, you've got Marty Walsh from Boston. I don't know where Marty is. We've got a lot of mayors—a lot of mayors. And that's why I think we're making such progress.

Look, the fact is that, you know, I was—it's fitting that we are here together today because you mayors know how to get things done. And that's not hyperbole; it's a fact. Because you have no choice, as a matter of fact.

Yesterday I was in California where—grappling with historic——

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. California. Started off—the Governor looked at me, and he said, "Mr. President, we used to be the fifth largest economy in the world, and now we're the fourth"—and that's true—"in the world." I'll tell you what. So I genuflected, and we moved on. *[Laughter]*

I said, "That means you don't need that \$10 billion we just gave you, right?" *[Laughter]* And you all think I'm kidding. That's what we did: \$10 billion. But all kidding aside, he's a great Governor and has—*[inaudible]*—well. But look, dealing with historic storms and flooding.

You know, when your town or city faces a crisis, it's the mayor who gets the first call. And I've seen it. I've traveled this country after floods and tornadoes, wildfires, hurricanes.

As a matter of fact, I was kidding, but there's a serious piece to it. When I pointed out that—to the Governor, "We've got to stop taking these helicopter rides." Because I went over—I think it was the fifth one in his State, traveling the State. And more of the forest has burned down there up—and in Oregon than the entire State of Missouri. I mean, it's a long, long, long way. A lot of damage.

And I want to thank the mayors across the country for doing everything—everything they can to recover and rebuild. It matters that the ones who—you're the ones who make sure, as trite as it sounds, that the garbage gets picked up, the potholes get fixes, the buses that you can catch to work and be able to continue to be there on time, and so much more of significant consequence.

But those things are consequential. You affect people's quality of life more than any other group of people in the world. And mayors know the measure of success isn't how many partisan points you score, it's how many problems you fix—can you fix the problem.

When I came to office, we had a lot problems to fix. The——

[The President experienced technical difficulties with the microphone.]

Can you hear me?

The pandemic was raging. Our economy was reeling. But we acted together. Now, 2 years in, it's clearer than ever that our plan is working. We're building the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. Not just the top down.

Because when we do that, by the way, the wealthy do very, very well. And everybody—the poor have a shot, and the middle class can have a little breathing room. An economy that benefits the folks in the Heartland as well as in our cities and all across America.

And you know, I remember—you know, I—as I said, my family—I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. When coal died when I was in third grade, we had to move. But I go back to Scranton. Everybody is—the joke is: They're from Scranton. Everybody is from Scranton.

But think of all the towns you know—and some of you are mayors of—that they go through school; they want to stay where their family is, where their relatives are, where they know everything; and they have to say: "Mom, I've got to leave. There's no jobs here. There's no jobs here in my town." I'm serious. I'm deadly earnest.

And what we're trying to do is not just rebuild an economy, but bring back the pride—the pride—and the sense of belonging and the sense of "I want to stay where I live—where I live now, where I'm able to do what I want to do." And that's the whole purpose of what we're trying to do.

In our cities, when people used to move out—but you know, now they're beginning to move back in. Cities are growing. Not just big cities, small towns as well.

The economy that rewards work, where we don't need a college degree to provide for your family. It helps to have that college degree, but you don't need it to provide for your family.

Two years ago this week, 18 million people were out of work—2 years ago this week. Now the—that number is under 1.6 million, near the lowest level in decades. The unemployment rate is

as low as it's been in 50 years. We've created 11 million jobs, 750,000 manufacturing jobs. Where in the hell is it written to say we can't be the manufacturing capital of the world in this? I'm—I mean it. Not a joke.

I got so sick and tired of us exporting jobs and importing product. We're now importing jobs and exporting product. That's what we're going to do—that's what we're doing. No, I really mean it. Because we're beginning to invest in ourselves again, because of you all.

Over the last 2 years, more Americans applied to start a small business than any year in history—any year on record. They make up 50 percent of all the economy in America.

Fewer families are facing foreclosure and eviction before—than before the pandemic. Families in our communities are starting to breathe just a little bit easier.

But, folks, it's not only that. Pride is coming back to American communities and to American cities. And that's not just on the coasts, as I said. It's in every part of the country, including many towns and cities and local communities that have been forgotten for much too long—much too long.

And it's not an accident. It's a strategy that, when I came to office—a strategy that we stuck to even in the face of a lot of criticism. A strategy that we put into action. A strategy to recover and rebuild and invest in America.

You know, hesitate a second—just to digress a little bit. We used to invest 2 percent of our GDP in research and development every year. That's what we did in America. But then, along the way, we stopped. We stopped investing in America, in research and development. We invest now seven-tenths of 1 percent.

We used to be number one. Now China is number two. We're number eight—I mean, there's—the things we've allowed to happen. It's not been conscious. It just, sort of, slipped up on us. We just—and the way in which we changed the way we dealt with corporate law. A whole range of things. But we're changing it. And we're changing it. As I said, we're going to export product, not jobs.

With your support, I signed into law the American Rescue Plan to deliver immediate economic relief to families and communities that needed it most. One study found that before the law was passed, 70 percent of the mayors in America expected to cut critical jobs like teachers and transit workers. Twenty-seven percent of you were facing steep cuts in police department budgets. So we acted.

And with the CARES Act we passed under the previous administration, some of it had to go to you—you had to go to your legislatures for permission to get the money.

I've been the bad guy when I was a Senator and as Vice President—a pain in the neck. Why do you have to go through the legislature? *[Laughter]* No, no, I'm serious. I'm deadly earnest about that. Because if you go through the legislature, you can't blame them. They say, "I want a piece of my district." But you can apply directly.

[Inaudible]—when I wrote the COPS bill years ago. You didn't have to go to the legislature or your Governor to determine. You could apply directly. If you qualified, you got it directly. You got the money directly. Well, that's what we're talking about. And things are beginning to change.

Instead, we made sure the American Rescue Plan empowered you directly—directly. To avoid painful layoffs, you put cops back on the street, firefighters back into jobs. You kept teachers in classrooms. You asked for the money, and you qualified for it.

In Knoxville, Tennessee, Mayor Kincannon gave a premium pay—is the mayor here?

Mayor Indya Kincannon of Knoxville, TN. Yes, I'm right here.

The President. There you are, Mayor. Well, you gave premium pay to police officers and firefighters to keep them on the job. It was a big deal.

In Mesa, Arizona, Mayor Giles—I don't know whether the mayor is here. I'm going to get people in trouble calling this out. There—[*laughter*]. Mr. Mayor, how are you? Bought five new ambulances, hired behavioral health clinicians to help the fire department in crisis calls.

And by the way, you know, when a cop turns up in a domestic violence case or someone is on a—standing on edge of bridge, they don't need a cop. They need a psychologist with them. That's why we're putting more people—no, I'm serious.

We're beginning to understand this all again. And a lot of you are applying for the money and using it for these mental health issues as well. You know, there are countless examples.

When it comes to public safety—when it comes to public safety—we know the answer is not to defund the police. [*Applause*] Not to defund the police. It's to retrain some police. It's to make sure there's accountability. It's to make sure we know exactly what's happened. But it's not to defund the police. They need more funding, and they need ancillary help as well.

And so the American Rescue Plan—\$350 billion of State and local governments—and we urged them to make—it was available to them—to make communities safer.

It turned out that—one of the largest investments in public safety ever. And every single Republican in Congress voted against it. But a lot of the mayors said—you talked to your representative and said, "Whoa, whoa, what—that, you know—it may be Biden's idea, but it—not all his ideas are bad." [*Laughter*] Oh, you think I'm kidding? I'm not kidding. You know. [*Laughter*]

Many cities from Newark, New Jersey; to Baton Rouge, Louisiana—[*laughter*]—but all kidding aside—have made major investments in community violence intervention initiatives. These studies have shown, in some cases, they can reduce violent crime up to 60 percent, particularly among our youth. It doesn't always do that much, but it can do that—that much.

But as you mayors know better than most, when you see these problems of crime and the opioid epidemic, you know that a big part of that is mental health—mental health. And I want to take a moment to talk to you about how we're addressing that as well.

By the way, Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General, has been really focusing on this a great deal. A lot of you have worked with him.

Through the American Rescue Plan, we've provided initial funding for cities to start to address some of the mental health needs arising from the pandemic: \$5 billion for States and community organizations to deliver mental health and substance abuse treatment; \$103 million in funding specifically to address mental health on front—for frontline health professionals, like nurses.

You've read—in your communities, you've dealt with your hospitals where the nurses are just overworked and having serious, serious problems, in terms of their own mental health.

But we know it wasn't enough. So the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, and we went even further. That provides \$10 billion to address mental health needs; \$2 billion of that is for young people in particular to pay for things like school counselors.

And we know what fentanyl is doing to families and communities all across the country. We've worked hard to make sure the first responders have what they need when they respond to overdoses for young people who are dying.

And by the way, we've confiscated enormous—an enormous amount of fentanyl, not just at the border, but beyond the border. We've confiscated throughout—I think it's—let me get the number here. I don't want to get it wrong. We've confiscated 379 million doses of fentanyl. And by the way, 100,000—and mostly kids—have died from fentanyl, and it's put in things that—that they never anticipated it's part of.

As mayors, as you know how much this matters. This is why I brought many former mayors into the administration. Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms is here. I said it was harder being mayor of Atlanta than being President, but I don't know. *[Laughter]* I'm—I'm only—only kidding.

But all kidding aside, well, what—she's a Senior Adviser on Public Engagement, led the cities through the pandemic. She makes sure to bring the perspective of local officials and community leaders to decisions we make here at the White House.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, a former mayor in Iowa, is strengthening our Nation's rural communities. And he really is. He's a smart, smart guy. He knows what he's doing. And he—I know he's the Secretary of Agriculture, but what he's doing: American grocery stores are stocked while American farmers thrive, and our young people have access to food when schools are closed.

Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs Marcia Fudge. Marcia is right here. She's got a hell of a job. A former mayor in Ohio—working very—working very hard to close the wealth gap, expanding efforts to build generational wealth through home ownership.

How did all the mainstream middle class people get their wealth? Ninety percent of them through investing in their homes. They were able to buy a home. They built equity in their home. That's how they were able to borrow to get their kids to school. That's how they built their equity. Well, the same thing is happening now, and she's working really hard to provide that opportunity. And as well as combating homelessness, which a lot of you are dealing with on your streets.

And while folks continue to recover, we're also rebuilding. Mitch Landrieu, the former mayor of New Orleans who was president of this organization, is now my Senior Adviser and Infrastructure Coordinator to help me rebuild America through a once-in-a-generation bipartisan infrastructure bill. It's always hard to make—*[applause]*. He's and working with all of you to modernize our Nation's roads, highways, bridges, railroads, airports, ports, water systems, the—the internet, and so much more.

Last year alone, nearly 7,000 projects were identified and are underway with funding from the infrastructure law. By the end of this year, that will be more than 20,000—more than 20,000.

If I can say it again for a second, to digress slightly: One of the things I've been telling the press—and they look at me, like—well, they look at me like I'm wonderful, right? *[Laughter]*

No, all—no, all kidding aside, why I keep saying it: We did a lot last year with your help. It's only now beginning to bear fruit, because we passed this infrastructure bill. That's a 10-year bill, and it's taking time to get it off the ground.

Mitch McConnell and I just announced the construction of a new bridge—a billion dollars—across the Ohio River. It's going to fundamentally change transportation north and south not just from Ohio and Kentucky, but across the Nation.

So many things are happening. We passed the bill relating to the cost of insulin. Well, guess what? Only now, as of January 1, a lot of people are waking up and finding out, if they're on Medicare, they only have to pay 35 bucks a month instead of 400 bucks a month to save their lives.

And I want the drug companies to be able to make money, but I tell you what, they have to be able to explain when they raise the price that as—beyond inflation, that they've invested more money in what they did in order to justify the price. Otherwise, guess what? We're going to go back and get it from them—[laughter]—under the law. No, I'm serious. I'm serious.

We're so we're doing things that just make some common sense—just some common sense because you all.

Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, former mayor of Boston——

[*The President briefly imitated a Boston accent.*]

He's parking his cars. I kid Marty. But he's making sure these projects have prevailing wage and purporting them to move and suggest for significant apprenticeships so people can make a living off of what they're doing.

And then, by the way, I'm going to talk in a minute about the—dealing with the whole idea of what we're doing in terms of new investments and the—with the CHIPS legislation.

Well, one of the leading investors of over—I think it's, so far, \$22 billion in the United States is from another country. I said, "Why are you investing in America?" He said, "Because you got the best workers, and you're the safest environment in the world in which we can do this."

So we're helping to rebuild our economy with jobs that don't require 4-year degrees, promoting an economy that works for middle class and working class Americans.

Transportation Secretary Pete is here. Look, we know the—better known as "Mayor Pete"—[laughter]—but he's working with many of you to address those quality-of-life issues that really matter to people you serve, not just through big bridges and highway projects, but through—though they're important—but also through smaller projects that are critical to your cities.

Like in Madison, Wisconsin, where Mayor Rhodes-Conway is buying 46 electric buses, replacing those dirty diesels—bad for the health of the environment—and making it clear. No, I'm serious. It's a big deal. Or helping the city rebuild airport. There you are, okay.

Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway of Madison, WI. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Well, thank you.

And it means our kids aren't going to be inhaling that diesel fumes when they get off the bus. For real. It matters. Environmentally, it matters as well.

And so, you know, we're helping cities rebuild airport terminals in Atlanta with Mayor Andre Dickens, in Orlando with Mayor Buddy Dyer, in L.A. with Karen Bass.

And, with the leadership of Vice President Harris, we're partnering with you to deliver affordable high-speed internet to every single household in America—affordable high-speed internet—so no parent has to park in front of a McDonald's when—to do the homework with their kid when they're on—when the school is not in session, when they can't go to school. It's a big deal.

It's a big deal for farmers, I might add, and a whole lot of other people that know exactly what products are costing and selling for. And now we're—50 million households have affordable internet that they didn't have just before we passed the law.

We're also making the biggest investment ever—ever, ever—in climate: the Inflation Reduction Act. We're creating millions of good-paying jobs and investing in fence-line communities that have suffered the most as a consequence of being smothered by pollution. Think of the "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana or Route 9 in Delaware, where all those facilities are.

Well, we've made a commitment. We're going to invest, first and foremost, as we clean up those communities—[inaudible]—go to the people from that community. And we're going to invest in that community to make that community better again.

Our economic agenda ignited a manufacturing boom, the semiconductor boom, the battery boom, the electric vehicle boom. We're making things in America again and in every part of America, cities large and small.

The mayor of Phoenix, Kate—is Kate here? Thank you, Kate, for being here. I was with her last month to announce a small investment: \$40 billion—[laughter]—\$40 billion invested by TSC—TMSC [TSMC; White House correction], the two semiconductor factories and thousands of union workers helping to build them.

And, Andy, you know, I—the "field of dreams" outside of Columbus, where Intel is investing—it's a hundred acres, but they're investing \$20 billion to expand semiconductor manufacturing. I said a hundred—a thousand acres. I dubbed it—I didn't mean to; I shouldn't have—but I said this is a "field of dreams." It is. It's a field of dreams.

And by the way, of those jobs, about—of those 12,000 jobs, 7,000 are construction jobs. But guess what? They're paying prevailing wage. And those 5,000 jobs left, the average salary at those places, they tell me, are going to be 123,000 bucks a year, and you don't need a college degree to do those jobs.

This is, in part, urged by all of you. This is happening in no small—small part because of bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act. Everybody signed on. The folks who joined me at the bill signing and other victories, with your support, so many of you signed the first—we've signed the first major gun legislation in 30 years.

Now I'll say what I've said before, and not all of you are going to agree with me, but we're going to ban assault weapons. I did it once, and we're going to do it again. And the number of bullets that can be in a clip.

On Sunday, we acknowledge what would have been the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. We're continuing to fight and protect a woman's right to choose.

Last year—[applause]—and last year, when I held the first-of-its-kind White House summit, at the request of others, against hate-fueled violence, this group led the effort with 150 mayors to sign a compact—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—to prevent and address this type of violence in our communities. I'm committed to continuing this work with all of you, but I need you badly.

But there's more to do. As was mentioned by the—by your president, immigration is another major issue affecting many of your communities, particularly border communities and near—and near communities.

I visited the border earlier this month, the first time as President. I've been there before, but for the first time as President. And I'm taking action where I have the legal capacity to do so. I'll continue to call on Congress to act to pass comprehensive immigration reform to fix the system.

The first bill I introduced was a comprehensive reform legislation on immigration. But because of some in the Congress, they refused to consider it. They found it a better issue to campaign on than an issue to solve.

So we have a choice: They can keep using immigration to try to score political points, or we can help solve the problem. Immigration reform used to be a bipartisan issue. And we can make it that again, in my view.

Let me close with this: I ran for office for three reasons. One was—and I was—even my campaign team thought I was wrong, in terms of what the basis upon which I was running. But one of the things after—you know, I—when I got elected as a 29-year-old kid to the Senate—I had to wait to be—legally be—to be able to be sworn in, because I wasn't old enough. No joke. I—you know, I was—they talked about, you know, my being the, you know, the youngest; I wasn't. There was one younger, elected popularly, than I was.

But you know, I spent a lot of time—I used to get asked all the time, Mr. Mayor, "What's the secret?" Because if I won against a really good guy, he was a decent man, we never had a cross word with us—[inaudible]—a progressive Republican who helped write the Clean Water and Clean Air Act, et cetera. But we had disagreements on a number of other things. And second time I ran, he actually endorsed me.

But the point of this is—it's simple. I used to get asked, "What's the—there must be a secret. If you could have won, there must be some secret."

And I used to think about it, that people, for the next 3, 4 years would ask me that, who were running for office in Delaware. And I finally figured it out. And you all are successful, and you know it. I said: "The secret is, have you figured out what's worth losing over? Have you figured out what's so important to you, you'd rather lose than win and have to compromise on it?"

And so, when I ran this time—and I had not planned on running again, and all you were probably saying, "Why the hell didn't you follow your instinct?"—[laughter]—but I honest to God didn't. My son had passed away, and I had no desire to—I was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Things were going fine.

To make a long story short, when I did, I decided there were three reasons to run. And I mean it. One was to restore the soul of America—the decency, honor, the idea we could deal with one another. No, I genuinely mean it.

[Inaudible]—the way—and I've been this way my whole career—how we build the economy, from the bottom up and the middle out. For real. I—look, I come from the State of corporate America. More corporations are incorporated in my State than every other one of your States combined. Combined. And I got elected seven times there though. So, you know, it wasn't I was anticorporate, but I have a different view in terms of what the priority should be.

And so, as I said, when the middle does well, they generate hope, give chance to the working class. And when they do well, the wealthy do very, very well.

Well, and the third reason I ran, which has been—turned out to be the hardest to deal with, and that's unite the country. We are a democracy. We cannot be sustained if we stay 50 different islands or two different parties that no longer talk to one another.

For the last 2 years since my Inauguration, I think we made some progress, in large part because of many of you sitting in this room. And I'm really optimistic in the year ahead that we're implementing the laws we've already passed, we will deliver real benefits, and people are going to feel them in their everyday lives.

You know, that work we're going to continue to do together. Together, we're proving that every city and town in this country, our best days are ahead of us, not behind us. And I really mean it.

I was asked by my senior team—and Pete will remember it: If I could do anything to change the attitude of optimism in America, what was the one thing I'd do? Just if I could change one thing. It's going to sound bizarre what I tell you. I said I'd cure cancer. And they looked at me like, "Well, cure cancer?" Because nobody thinks—it's the most frightening thing to people. And if we did it, America can do big things again.

There's nothing beyond our capacity. I swear to God. There is nothing beyond the capacity of the United States of America. Remember who in hell we are. We're the United States of America. When we work together, there's nothing beyond our capacity. Nothing, nothing, nothing. So we've got to work together, folks.

God bless you all; may God protect our troops. And now I'm going to turn it over to Julie. Thank you.

They gave me a different mike they can turn off. So I—[laughter].

Office of Intergovernmental Affairs Director Julie Chávez Rodríguez. Thank you so much, Mr. President. And now we have a couple of questions that we will take from a couple of mayors.

We'll start with Mayor Tishaura Jones from St. Louis, Missouri.

Mayor Tishaura O. Jones of St. Louis, MO. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

The President. Mayor, how are you?

Federal Debt and Deficit/Tax Code Reform/Public Debt Limit/Entitlement Programs/Education/Federal Support for Municipalities

Mayor Jones. Great. Great. Thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law and the CHIPS and Science Act, we're seeing jobs return to our cities, and we're preparing our citizens for the many opportunities to come. What can we as mayors do to help you further your agenda of shoring up our national security and bring more high-quality jobs to America's cities?

The President. I think two things. One, be realistic and don't confuse the national debt with debt reduction on a yearly basis.

The debt we're paying on—and we're going to have a little discussion about that with the—with the new majority leader of the House—has accumulated over 200 years. Over 200 years. Not a joke. That's how long—that's what—that's what the national debt is. It's over, you know, \$31 trillion, but it's over 200 years.

And one-quarter of that debt—one-quarter of that debt was accumulated in the 4 years of my predecessor. One-quarter of it.

So what we've actually done, Mayor, we've actually cut the deficit on a yearly basis. In the first year, because of what you—now, I'm not being solicitous—because of what you all did—\$350 billion. And last year—this year, we cut that deficit on a yearly basis by over a trillion dollars. So it's over a trillion—roughly—four hundred billion dollars we've cut the deficit, the yearly deficit—the year to year.

We've got to focus on making sure we do not accumulate more debt on the historic 200 years and gradually continue to reduce it.

One of the things that we've done is, the—the budget we're going to be introducing, and you all are going to see, is expected to reduce the debt another trillion dollars this next year by spending more—spending less than we spending less than we bring in.

Now, the big debate—and I'll be honest with you, and I'm going to talk about in the State of the Union—is a fundamental disagreement on what we should do to cut—what do we cut? Well, it's not just cutting. What do you raise? What taxes do people pay? How do they pay their taxes, and do they pay it fairly?

And so one of the things that's going to be a big issue in dealing with the national debt that could—if we don't meet our national debt and renege on the first time, we have a calamity that exceeds anything that's ever happened financially in the United States.

And so one of the things that we're going to do is, it's going to get down to a decision of whether do we, in fact, make sure that folks—do we cut Social Security to raise taxes on trillionaires? I mean, billionaires. There's 745 or -50 billionaires in America. Average tax rate they pay is 2 percent. I think you should be able to be a billionaire, but I think you should pay a little more than 2 percent.

No, no, I—I'm—and by the way, I'm not trying to—as Mayor Duggan knows me well, I'm not trying to be alarming about it. But, I mean, it's a reality.

Now, the argument—there's a lot of arguments why that shouldn't be, because they generate so much energy and so much growth, et cetera. But there's a lot of things we can do.

Now, the option that's being—is going to be offered, you're going to see, is they want to—the way to deal with cutting that debt is to cut Social Security, cut Medicaid. We've got to do something about Social Security and—no, but—but this is—these are the kind of debates we're going to have. And they're going to be honest debates.

For you, it seems to me—for a mayor, the things that I believe—and I have not been a mayor, but I think I've watched long enough to know the difference between great ones like you and folks who don't do much—[laughter]—or don't—I shouldn't say "don't do much." I shouldn't say that. Who have had more difficulty—is focus on the things that make your city unique and make it grow.

What are the things that make it grow? Well, first of all, let me—I could go on, but I'm just going to give you one example. We're in a situation where, if you were a—one of the reasons why America became the most advanced and economically prosperous nation in the 21st century: We're the first nation in the world have a universal education system—grades 1 through 12. Now, others had systems that were superior to ours, in terms of their exclusiveness, but not universal.

Now, I wonder if anybody—if today we were starting off and saying, "Oh, we're going to decide—we decide we're going to have to have a universal education system," would anybody think, in the second quarter of the 21st century, that 12 years was enough to compete?

Audience member. No.

The President. I don't think so. For—I mean, for real.

So a lot of you are doing a lot of experimental work, in terms of not just pre-K, but you're doing it in terms of education—teaching kids to read, write, add, and subtract at 3 and 4 and 5 years old, and not—and you're focusing on apprentice programs after college.

You're focusing on—I mean, after high school. And you're focusing in high school on allowing people to learn trades instead of—remember, there used to be even—even you're old enough to remember, they're—not you, Mayor. [Laughter]

But when, you know, there were shop classes in school where people learned whether they could—if they're comfortable working with their hands, whether they—so there's a lot of things that we can do in education.

There's a lot of things you can also do in terms of dealing with—I'm going to get you a lot more money, God willing, because I think we have universal support for it, beyond the money that came out of the original legislation. There's proposal that I've just presented to—I'm the guy that wrote the community policing law, but got very bad publicity.

But guess what? People are figuring out—guess what?—it works. The people who most need the help, the most victimized are the poorest communities. So we need cops in those communities from those communities, but cops that are held accountable to everything that they say we're supposed to do. And we can do that.

So, focusing on law enforcement that, in fact, is equitable; focusing on—you know, for example, nationally, I still think we should have the George Floyd legislation, but I didn't able to do that. So what I was able to do—I said no-knock warrants are limited significantly. We're in a situation where you have to—no chokeholds. There are certain basic things.

You know, when I was coming up as a kid, you know, cops were learned to—you know, required to learn to shoot to kill. Well, you ought to be able to shoot to stop. You know? Everything shouldn't be an extreme. There's—so the way we train police officers is changing.

And there's a lot of things you can look at to determine whether or not you can affect the safety of your city. And also, I think that—well, I'm not going to go on, but—so there's a lot of things you can do. Because I believe you'll have the economic wherewithal, through the programs and the Federal Government not telling you what to do, but giving you the wherewithal to do the things that you think most need to be done. And every community has a slightly different need—a slightly different need, in terms of emphasis.

And you know, I think one of the great mayors in the country is Duggan from Detroit. Not a joke. I got a—I was—I'll tell you what: He inherited a hell of a situation. And I remember Barack Obama turned to me one day and said—not a joke—"Joe, fix Detroit." I said, "Oh, no problem." [Laughter] "No problem."

Well, I got to know Detroit. I found out things the mayor taught me was—guess what?—that something was as close to 70 percent of the people in this—60 percent of the people in the city who were high school educated, had jobs—they were outside the city. And they couldn't get there. They didn't have—60 percent of them didn't have cars. So we ended up getting—what?—20 new buses, was it, initially?

I mean, you know, just practical things to determine what are the things that both allow neighborhoods to stay united and move.

And, again, there's a lot—and one of the things that Mayor Landrieu, as I still call him the "mayor," but he's much more than that. He's running this show for me, because we also have—I can't remember the—I asked for the phone number, and I forgot it.

Senior Adviser and Infrastructure Act Implementation Coordinator Mitchell J. Landrieu.
Eight-eight-one—

The President. Eight-eight-one—

Senior Adviser Landrieu. —eight-nine—

The President. —eight-nine

Senior Adviser Landrieu. —four-six.

The President. —four-six.

That you can call because we have people in here—no, no—no, I'm not joking. A lot of people know we have these programs, but they're hard to navigate. So you can pick up the phone and call. "How do I get the money to do A, B, C, or D? Can I do this with that?"—to cut through the red tape.

Anyway, I hope I answered—

Director Rodriguez. Thank you.

The President. [Laughter] You're about to cut me off.

Director Rodriguez. Thank you, Mr. President. We do have one more question from Mayor Schieve, from Reno, Nevada.

Mayor Hillary L. Schieve of Reno, NV. Hi, thank you. So, first of all, thank you for inviting us to your home. We love what you've done with the place. *[Laughter]* It's beautiful.

And also, I want to say thank you——

The President. You like museums, right? *[Laughter]*

Mayor Schieve. I want to say thank you from the bottom of all of our hearts. I know everyone in the room is so grateful that you have brought mayors into your Cabinet. I think it should be a requirement of every President.

Mayor Landrieu, I love you. Mayor Pete, I love you. And I honestly believe, like, more has been done because of that. And so thank you so much for your leadership. We are so grateful.

The President. We have, what, six—six mayors in Cabinet positions?

Mayor Schieve. I think six. All right, maybe we can get to 12? *[Laughter]*

The President. Well, we have——

Mayor Schieve. I know six more in here that would like to come.

The President. We have more women than men. *[Laughter]*

Mayor Schieve. See? Love that too. Love that too.

So you talked a little bit about mental health, and I want to say thank you so much for your leadership on that. It means the world to me. We are so fortunate to work with your Surgeon General. He is fantastic. He is fantastic.

So all your mayors in the room are going to become mental health warriors. And we're going to be addressing addiction and loss and grief. And I'm going to ask you something very personal. You've had a lot of loss and grief in your life. And I know over the last few years, a lot of Americans have had a loss—a lot of loss and grief because of the pandemic.

What would be your—what would—what would you say to them, and your advice to someone experiencing personal loss and grief?

The President's Advice on Dealing With Loss and Grief/Support for Families With Young Children/Mental Health

The President. Well, first of all, as close staff knows, I spend a lot of time with folks who have gone through loss—wife, daughter, husband, children, et cetera.

And, granted, I did lose my wife and daughter right after I got elected to the Senate. A tractor trailer broadsided them, killed my wife and daughter. And my two boys were little boys; they were on top of their deceased mom and sister for a long while because it took the—my local fire department a long time to get the "Jaws of Life" to get them out.

And then I—the guy who should be standing here, if there was any Biden who was going to be President—and I'm not—it's not hyperbole—is my son Beau. He's more qualified than I was.

And—but he decided—I'll never forget. He asked me one Friday, he said, "Dad, what are you doing on Friday?" And I said, "What do you need?" He said, "I'd like you to swear me in." I said: "Swear you in? You're attorney general of the State of Delaware. Swearing you in to what?" He said, "I joined the United States National Guard—the Delaware National Guard."

And then, when they—his unit got sent, he didn't have to go, but he got an exemption to go as long as he gave up the seat. And you know, that was tough. But you know what? I had family. I had an incredible wife. No man deserves one great love, let alone two. And I had a mom and a dad and a sister and a brother who were alive.

And, for example, when I—when the accident happened, early on—my sister is my best friend in the world. Gave up her home, and she and her husband moved into my house to help me raise my kids. Without being asked, just moved in and—and by the way, 5 days after I was married, they were gone. [Laughter]

But I say that not about me, but it's about what mental health does. I had people around me that were there to help me. I was lucky.

I still—everybody thinks I commuted every day for—I've traveled over 1,200,000 miles on Amtrak. Not a joke. I commuted every single day for 36 years—and then beyond that, as Vice President—to go home. Everybody thought I got—went home because—I went home because I couldn't afford two places. But, anyway—no—[laughter].

I went home because I'd get to, you know, kiss my boys goodnight and lay down, we'd say our prayers. And then my daughter, et cetera. But I had my mother. I had my mother there. Every morning, I'd drop the boys off when they were little at my mom's house. And then later, I'd be able to drive them to school, and they'd be picked up. But my point is, I had so much help. And I had psychological help.

Everywhere and down, there was someone there to, basically, hold my hand. Well, that's the mental health that a lot of families don't have. They don't have.

And a lot of folks are in a situation where if they just had somebody to talk to, they just had—and that's why I think some of the things we can do that can also help families going through some really difficult times is, for example, a preschool education. Reading, writing, arithmetic—age 3.

That does two things. It helps your kid get an advantage, but it also helps mom or dad or a single parent or parents who are going through hell to have somebody there until 5 o'clock taking care of your kid by the—while they're learning.

So there's a lot of things that it does, that gives people—but in addition to that, people who have gone through really tough times with drug addiction and a whole range of other things—alcoholism—they also are in a situation where they find themselves being able to have the kind of medical help that is needed in the mental health side of it.

And so I just think having people to reach out who are professionals, who know how to deal with people going through trauma, tragedy, or self-inflicted wounds that they've had. And I—and it makes a gigantic difference.

The need for—I mean, look at what's happened. And I think we—I sometimes underestimate it because I stopped thinking about it, but I'm sure you don't: We lost 1—over 1 million people in several years to COVID.

What that means is—and the study was done that there are eight people close to every one of those—on average—those 1 million people. How many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncle, aunts, got up in the morning or sat down for dinner at night and there was an empty chair? How many? And what impact does that have on the rest of the family?

And there's a lot of tricks that you can be taught—a lot of things you can do to engage the children who survive, engage the children who aren't addicted, engage the parent who—so I just think there's so many things that you can do.

And the reason I gave you my personal story was: I think it's just about knowing somebody is there, knowing somebody you can reach out to when you get scared and hold their hand. Whether it's a drug problem, whether it's a physical problem, whether it's just a—and by the way, my wife Jill got very engaged with the Brits and the—and U.S. military in dealing with trying to

convince people—think of the military. The one thing you're taught to, as a warrior, is never complain, never explain, man. Don't complain. Well, guess what? Mental health is a problem. It's a serious problem. You have more people dying of suicide in the United States military than any other reason today—more people.

And so we got involved in reaching out to help families so that you don't make it—and then I'll conclude with this. We have to take the stigma off of mental health. Mental health is no different than you break your arm or your leg.

Audience member. That's right.

The President. No, it really isn't. It's the God's truth. It is a problem that is a medical problem.

And so hardest part is to get people—a lot of people—I'd say most people—to say—to acknowledge that "I'm getting help." I'm getting help. That's why we had this effort to deal—my wife dealt with this program to provide for health for, you know, posttraumatic stress for so many warriors. Pete, you toted a rifle, man. You were there. You see all the people.

I don't know how many people that—you just—that need the help. But they—it's a help that you need any more than you need if you broke your leg. But we've got to take the stigma away—the stigma away from the notion that you need mental health. Because it's no different.

And by the way, think of this: How many folks do you know, how many cops on your department need some mental health because they're suffering from posttraumatic stress, what they went through?

I mean, we don't look at them and say, you know, "They're weak." But you know, it's just about—anyway, we just got to reach out and change the notion of a stigma associated with the notion of seeking mental health. And it starts early.

When you—you can detect, with children, whether they need some guidance really—or, it doesn't mean they're, quote, "crazy"; it means they have some disposition that has to be treated. And there's a lot that can be done.

I'm talking too much. I apologize, guys. Thank you all very much for doing this.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:41 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Francis X. Suarez of Miami, FL, in his capacity as president, and Mayor Andy Ginther of Columbus, OH, in his capacity as second vice president, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Secretary of Transportation Peter P.M. Buttigieg, in his former capacity as mayor of South Bend, IN; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; Mayor Katherine S. Gallego of Phoenix, AZ; Senate Minority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell; Speaker of the House of Representatives Kevin O. McCarthy; and former Presidents Donald J. Trump and Barack Obama. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and her first husband Bruce Saunders. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 21.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. Conference of Mayors, remarks and question-and-answer session.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bass, Karen R.; Biden, Ashley; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, R. Hunter; Bottoms, Keisha Lance; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Chávez Rodriguez, Julie; Dickens, Andre; Duggan, Michael E.; Dyer, John H. Jr., "Buddy"; Fudge, Marcia L.; Gallego, Katherine S.; Giles, John C.; Ginther, Andy; Harris, Kamala D.; Jones, Tishaura O.; Kincannon, Indya; Landrieu, Mitchell J.; McCarthy, Kevin O.;

McConnell, A. Mitchell; Murthy, Vivek H.; Newsom, Gavin C.; Obama, Barack; Owens, Valerie Biden; Rhodes-Conway, Satya; Saunders, Bruce; Schieve, Hillary L.; Suarez, Francis X.; Trump, Donald J.; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Walsh, Martin J.

Subjects: Abortion; Apprenticeship programs and job training; Broadband and wireless technologies; California, disaster assistance; California, flooding damage and recovery efforts; California, Governor; Cancer research, prevention, and treatment; Community policing programs, improvement efforts; COVID–19 pandemic; Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Disaster assistance, California; Drug addiction, treatment and reduction efforts; Early childhood education; Economic improvement; Economic stimulus legislation; Education, global competitiveness; Environmental justice; Federal deficit and debt; First responders, service and dedication; Fiscal year 2024 budget proposal; Foreclosure and eviction, prevention efforts; Gun control efforts; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Home ownership, access and affordability; Homelessness, prevention and reduction efforts; Household income and wages; Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Immigration reform; Infrastructure improvements; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Coordinator; Insulin cost controls; Job creation and growth; Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement, use-of-force policy improvements; Mayors, U.S. Conference of; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Mental health programs and services; Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Public debt limit; Research and development; Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Secretary of Labor; Secretary of Transportation; Semiconductor manufacturing; Senate Minority Leader; Senior Adviser for Public Engagement; Small businesses, promotion efforts; Social Security program; Speaker of the House of Representatives; Tax Code reform; U.S. Surgeon General; Unemployment rate; Veterans, mental health services, improvement efforts; Vice President; Wildfires, damage and recovery efforts; Women's rights and gender equality.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300041.